



# Capitalism & Racism + Covid-19 = Murder

By Stephen Millies

April 11 - The Covid-19 pandemic is devastating New York City. Eighty refrigerator trucks are serving as mobile morgues to store the bodies. As of April 10, 92,384 people have been infected.

Inmates in the Rikers Island prison are being offered \$6 per hour to dig mass graves on Hart's Island off the Bronx. That's the site of Potter's Field, where a million people too poor to afford a funeral had their bodies dumped.

What's happening in New York City is being repeated in Detroit, Chicago, New Orleans and Los Angeles. The coronavirus is ripping through the South with Black people suffering the most. About one in ten deaths has occurred in the adjoining states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia.

The Pentagon is seeking 100,000 body bags. The government's stockpile of personal protective equipment — a life and death matter for health care workers — is almost depleted. But the Immigration and Customs Enforcement gestapo conducting deportation raids are guaranteed N95 face masks.

A hundred racist attacks against Asian Americans are occurring every day. Trump incited these attacks by calling the coronavirus "the Chinese virus." We should call it the Trump virus.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has taken advantage of the pandemic to roll back bail reform and ram through Medicaid cuts in the state's budget.

Cuomo calls the virus "the great equalizer." That isn't true even if his own brother, CNN host Chris Cuomo, caught it. It's certainly false with the city's wealthy and powerful fleeing to the countryside.

### There's nothing equal about this pandemic

There's nothing equal about this pandemic. The coronavirus has been much worse for New York City's Black and Latinx communities. Orthodox Jewish communities in Brooklyn have been hard hit.

This writer lives two blocks from the Corona, Queens, N.Y., neighborhood where Louis Armstrong lived. Its 11368 ZIP code had 2,248 cases of the coronavirus as of April 10, the most of any in New York City.

Experts say New York City has been hardest hit because of its density. Nearly 9 million people live on about 300 square miles of land.

Corona, Queens, is crowded with 41,768 people living per square mile. Two percent — have been infected.

Murray Hill — ZIP code 10017 — on midtown Manhattan's East Side is even more crowded, with 51,775 people per square mile. Yet the neighborhood's infection is just a quarter of Corona's.

The difference is that while Corona's median household income is \$45,964, the figure for Murray Hill is \$100,652, over twice as high.

Adjoining Corona in Queens is Elmhurst (ZIP code 11373) with 1,737 cases and Jackson Heights (ZIP code 11372) with 1,322 people infected. The Elmhurst Medical Center is being overwhelmed.

(Figures for the different zip codes are updated every few hours at [tinyurl.com/sp6gfv5](http://tinyurl.com/sp6gfv5))

All these neighborhoods are immigrant communities with many service and construction workers who had to continue going to their jobs while the pandemic was gripping the city.

Black and Latinx neighborhoods in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan have also been hard hit. The eastern Far Rockways in Queens, home to four largely Black housing projects, have 993 cases.

The capitalist government is covering up the impact on Asian, Black, Indigenous and Latinx communities. Maryland lawmakers are demanding a breakdown of those who've caught the virus.

### Social distancing an impossibility

Medical experts recommend that people keep a "social distance" of six feet from each other. How are the 2.2 million prisoners locked up supposed to follow that advice? Cook County Jail in Illinois already has 289 prisoners with the virus.

For thousands of prisoners across the country, the coronavirus will be a death sentence. Activists like those in the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression are fighting to free the most vulnerable prisoners.

The hundreds of thousands in homeless shelters are also not able to keep six feet from each other.

Social distancing is also impossible for the hospital and other "essential" workers taking overcrowded buses and subways in New York City. Fifty members of Transit Workers Union Local 100 have died of the coronavirus.

Many essential workers who are risking their lives are among the lowest paid. The 3.6 million cashiers have an average annual income of just \$22,430.

Experts are recommending that trips to the food store be limited to once every two weeks. How many working-class families can do that? Not the ten million workers who have already been fired.

Density and lack of social distancing won't account for all the deaths. We're told to wash our hands, yet 141,000 Detroit families have had their water shut off since 2014. Service hasn't been restored for thousands.

It's worse on the Indigenous reservations. Forty percent of Navajo nation households aren't connected to a water pipe. They have to haul water to their home.

Overcrowded housing has skyrocketed because of rising rent. Many families are forced to move in with relatives.

Between 1980 and 2010, the number of these doubled-up families increased almost four-fold, 1.15 million to 4.3 million. (2012 U.S. Statistical Abstract, Table 59). Social distancing is impossible for them.

Millions of housing units are kept off the market to keep the rent high. A people's movement is needed to seize them.

Homeless families in Los Angeles have taken over over 12 empty homes. We need to follow their example. ☈

## BALTIMORE AMAZON

# Organizing to defend workers' lives



By Sharon Black,  
former Amazon worker

At the time of this writing, workers from eight different Amazon warehouses have tested positive for Covid-19. This includes two separate sites in New York City, Staten Island and Queens, as well as sites in Jacksonville, Fla.; Oklahoma City; Brownstown, Mich.; Katy, Texas; Wallingford, Conn.; and Shepherdsville, Ky.

In Maryland, prior to Amazon's announcement that it was hiring 100,000 new workers to meet increased demand during the coronavirus crisis, workers had been receiving notices of mandatory shifts and threatening them with firings and write-ups if they did not report to work.

Baltimore Amazon workers and their supporters drew up a list of demands that they are advocating to protect their lives and the lives of the community.

They have launched a petition campaign and are advocating five demands and asking supporters and workers to sign on.

**Demand 1: Daily screening of all workers for fever and outward signs of Covid-19.** Weekly testing for all Amazon warehouse workers. Amazon workers are now categorized as essential to public service. Workers must have guaranteed safety networks in place. At any given time, there are 3,000 to 4,000 workers in a single building; this is not just a health risk to those individuals but to the whole community.

**Demand 2: We demand a minimum of \$15 per hour extra added as hazard pay** to the \$15 dollar base pay. Amazon now pays \$2 extra per hour during the quarantine, but the company actually paid \$2.40 extra during the holiday periods — more than it is offering during these extreme health risks. During this crisis and dangerous conditions, it's not enough. Amazon should not be making extra profit during this pandemic using exploited labor.

**Demand 3: Workers who are elderly, disabled and have weaker immune systems should be able to stay home** with full paid sick leave until the conditions are safe for them to return. We must protect vulnerable workers.

**Demand 4: End write-ups for failing to meet productivity rates** and quotas. Workers need to have the time to physically sanitize their work areas, wash their hands when needed, and practice safety without fear that they will be written up for working too slowly. This not only protects workers; it protects the community that receives packages.

**Demand 5: Extend all the above demands to contract workers at all Amazon facilities.** As we know, all facilities have third party contracted workers who make less than \$15 per hour and who do all the housekeeping and other work, including deliveries.

It's been pointed out that Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, who is one of the richest billionaires in the world, could easily implement these demands.

Readers can support the Amazon workers' demands by signing their petition: [tinyurl.com/wadx7n9](http://tinyurl.com/wadx7n9)



Carta del presidente Nicolás Maduro al pueblo estadounidense 10

# Gov't, bosses use pandemic emergency to escalate repression

By Greg Butterfield

Measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus are being used as a cover by officials of the U.S. capitalist government, from the federal to the state and local levels, to heighten their control and prepare to repress any protest or uprising of the workers and oppressed against the horrendous inadequacies of the for-profit health care system, the rapidly deepening crisis of unemployment and mass poverty, and threatened war moves by the Pentagon.

In Albuquerque, N.M., police shot and killed a 52-year-old Latinx man in his home after his employer asked them to do a welfare check. As is all-too-common, the cops claimed after the fact that their victim was responsible because he had a rap sheet. In Baltimore, National Guard units rolled through the city's streets and set up roadblocks, but did nothing to provide food to hungry residents of public housing like Douglas Houses. The Baltimore Housing Authority even tried to ban activist groups and food banks from distributing food there.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, while sparring with President Donald Trump and running a thinly veiled campaign for the White House, has called on the racist New York Police Department to get "more aggressive" in enforcing social distancing rules on youth. He also introduced legislation to roll back bail reform that went into effect Jan. 1, threatening to keep many more poor and oppressed people in the state's worst incubators of disease — the jails.

California Gov. Gavin Newsome floated the idea that martial law might be necessary. He backpedaled after an outcry, but the state and cit-

ies continue to tighten police measures. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) stormtroops have taken advantage of the situation to escalate attacks on migrant workers in that "sanctuary state."

The worker who led a walkout of Amazon warehouse workers in Staten Island, N.Y., demanding greater health and safety measures, was fired by billionaire boss Jeff Bezos, supposedly for violating social distancing. Across the country, health care workers have been threatened with retaliation for speaking out on their desperate need for personal protective equipment (PPE) and the public's need for mass testing for the virus.

The Trump administration's Bureau of Indian Affairs chose the very day that U.S. coronavirus cases topped 100,000 to announce it was planning to strip the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe of Massachusetts and Rhode Island of its official standing. On March 21, the Department of Justice under Attorney General William Barr requested that Congress enact legislation granting it sweeping emergency powers that would allow police to hold suspects indefinitely without charge and suspend other constitutional rights.

State governments have taken advantage of the public focus on the coronavirus crisis to heighten anti-women attacks on abortion rights and enact anti-transgender measures.

After tightening deadly sanctions against Iran, which is fighting a major attack of Covid-19, Trump threatened that country with military aggression. Then, on April 1, Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo used a media briefing on the coronavirus to announce they were deploying Navy warships to threaten Venezuela, another country struggling under U.S. sanctions.



Workers protest outside Amazon warehouse in Staten Island, N.Y., March 30.

There are many, many more examples.

## Defend the right to protest

Working-class communities, their organizations and other progressive forces well understand the need for urgent measures to "flatten the curve" and try to slow the spread of the deadly disease, even though it is at great hardship to their lives and livelihoods.

At the same time, more and more workers classified as "essential" — most of them low-paid, and disproportionately Black and Brown — are walking off the job and engaging in other forms of protest against their mistreatment by the bosses.

It's clear to everyone forced to work in dangerous conditions without necessary safety measures and equipment, adequate health coverage, sick time or job protections, that their "essential" categorization is seen by their employers as nothing but an excuse for greater exploitation and greater profits — the health of the workers, their families and communities be damned!

One of the first restrictions to be put in place in many cities, like San Francisco, Seattle and Washington, D.C., was strict limits on gatherings. First gatherings of 100 or more were banned, then 50, then 10 or fewer. Now any "non-essential gathering" of any size is a no-no in New York. People are advised to social distance — put a minimum of six feet between them and another person — and stay in their homes as much as possible. (This advice is ludicrous, not to mention insulting, to the hundreds of thousands of homeless people.)

Physical distancing makes sense from the point of view of limiting the virus's spread. At the same time, the Centers for Disease Control and other official bodies in the U.S. have resisted repeated advice from China and other countries that have successfully brought the pandemic under control to encourage people to wear protective masks when they leave their homes. Wearing masks has proved to be effective in limiting the spread of the virus, but the capitalist profit system was not able to produce the masks as needed, thus the policy to discourage use of masks, unlike socialist China, where masks were available for all.

Front-line workers have found

creative ways to engage in protest while trying to respect the social-distancing guidelines. Nurses and food-processing workers have staged actions outside their workplaces while holding signs, carefully spreading out at a six-foot distance from one another. Immigrant rights and prisoners' advocates have held car rallies, with protesters driving in vehicle caravans to detention centers and prisons to demand the captives' release from dangerous conditions.

The firing of Christian Smalls, the African American man who led the Amazon walkout in Staten Island, N.Y., shows how the bosses and the capitalist state can use the emergency measures to punish workers who stand up to them. "It was blatant retribution," Smalls said.

In Bolivia, the right-wing coup regime brought to power last year with U.S. help has issued arrest warrants for six transportation workers who joined a mass protest by hungry workers and peasants in Riberalta, reported independent journalist Ollie Vargas. The protest was viciously attacked by government troops for defying the country's quarantine measures. Of course, measures to stop the spread of the virus mean little if people starve to death.

With National Guard troops already activated in 27 states — mostly by Democratic governors — and President Trump authorizing further mobilizations, it is not hard to imagine the possibility of similar scenes in the streets of U.S. cities in coming weeks and months as depression-level unemployment, and lack of adequate health care, potentially leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths, drive working-class communities to take mass action just to survive.

The deepening crisis and the repressive power-grab by capitalist politicians shows the urgency of initiatives like the national webinar sponsored by the Baltimore Peoples Power Assembly and Harriet Tubman Solidarity Center of Los Angeles on March 28, "Defending People During the Coronavirus Crisis." That online event brought together activists and organizations from across the U.S. to begin building a fightback network that can organize a united response to the crisis and mobilize to defend the workers and oppressed over the coming months. ■

## Police brutality victim Renardo Lewis waiting for justice

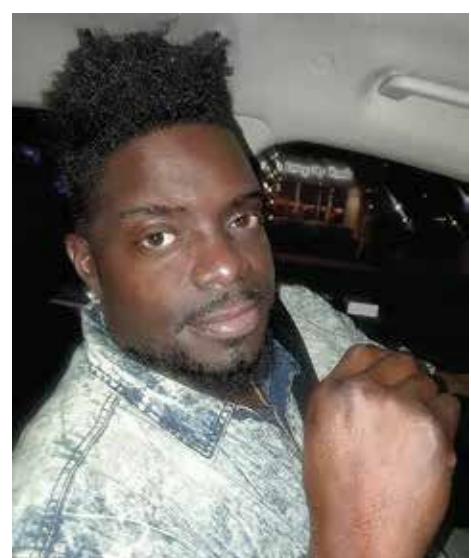
By Lizz Toledo

One year after the police in Cobb County, Ga., assaulted and then arrested Renardo Lewis at an IHOP restaurant, the Lewis family is still waiting for justice.

During this Covid-19 crisis, created by the capitalist system's callous disregard for our lives, Lewis is still being held under house arrest. A hard-working family man, Lewis is only allowed to work at his restaurant, RC Southern Cooking. He spent over a month in jail last spring for no other reason than the racism of the Cobb County Police.

The Atlanta Peoples Power Assembly is asking people to call the office of Cobb County District Attorney Joyette Holmes at (770) 528-3080 and demand that the charges against Renardo Lewis be dropped.

RC, as he is known by friends and family, states: "We are blessed and



Renardo Lewis

thankful to be alive and well during these difficult times. We're also so thankful for all the support from everyone. That night has changed our lives. Thanks for everything and be safe out there."

*Read more about the Renardo Lewis case here: [tinyurl.com/y5d36oxu](http://tinyurl.com/y5d36oxu)*

**BLACK AUGUST 1619-2019** [tinyurl.com/vn3qvn5](http://tinyurl.com/vn3qvn5)  
Book commemorates 400 years of Black freedom struggle

# The \$2 trillion stimulus, a slush fund for Wall Street

By Gary Wilson

March 27 — The \$2 trillion stimulus plan passed by Congress and signed by President Donald Trump on March 27 is a massive giveaway to Big Business and the Wall Street banks with a small, short-term plan for workers who've lost their jobs and possibly their homes.

The only part of the stimulus plan that gets much media coverage is the provisions for the working class. There's a small increase in unemployment insurance, and a one-time direct payment of \$1,200 per adult (not the \$2,000 a month proposed by Bernie Sanders, which is what is being done in Canada).

These relief provisions will take about \$250 billion, a fraction of the \$2 trillion package. There is no support for full paid sick leave, no halt to evictions and foreclosures, no freeze on layoffs — economic measures that are required to counter the crisis.

Some \$454 billion of the stimulus plan is a slush fund for the Federal Reserve Bank, report Pam Martens and Russ Martens. "The text of the final bill was breathtaking in the breadth of new powers it bestowed on the Federal Reserve, including the Fed's ability to conduct secret meetings."

The result, Pam Martens and Russ Martens say, is that the Federal Reserve will leverage the bill's bailout fund into \$4.5 trillion, which will be handed out through the New York Fed. And, to ensure that the Fed doesn't have to reveal where that \$4.5 trillion goes, the bill suspends the Freedom of Information Act for the Fed.

## The Boeing bailout

The rest of the \$2 trillion plan? Some \$367 billion is for small business loans. And then there are other industry-specific loans, including to airlines and hotels. None of those go to the workers in those industries or include any kind of job protection.

A hidden bonus payment is going to Boeing. The Wall Street Journal reports that "Boeing is set to emerge as a big winner of the coronavirus stimulus package."

The Washington Post reported on March 25, "Lawmakers have insert-

ed in the Senate's \$2 trillion stimulus package a little-noticed provision aimed at providing billions of dollars in emergency assistance to Boeing, the aerospace giant. ... The carve-out is separate from the \$58 billion the Senate package is providing in loans for cargo and passenger airlines."

"Call it the 'Boeing bailout,'" says R.J. Eskow, a senior adviser for health and economic justice, in a report produced by Economy for All at the Independent Media Institute. "As the world struggles with the pandemic, Boeing should be seen as the vector for a parallel epidemic. It's Patient Zero in an epidemic of corporate failure."

The corporate failure epidemic is the capitalist economic crash that was looming even before the coronavirus pandemic.

Boeing is among the largest global aerospace manufacturers. It is the second-largest defense contractor in the world, based on 2018 revenue, and is the largest exporter in the United States by dollar value, says USA Today.

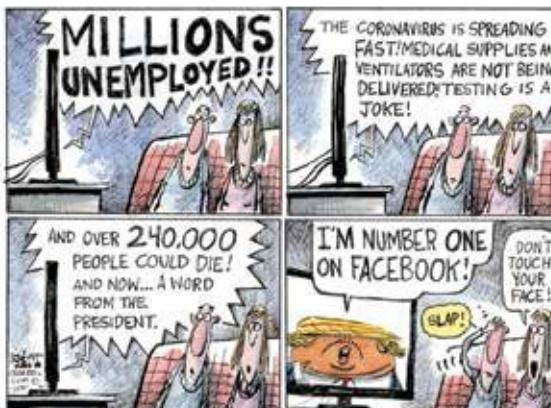
In January 2020, Boeing had gone into negative numbers in sales of its commercial airplanes, that is, it was losing orders for the first time in more than 30 years.

In other words, the Boeing crisis and the bailout by Congress and the president has nothing to do with the coronavirus pandemic and its reductions in travel.

In commercial aircraft, Boeing was being outsold by Airbus, which had a more desirable, fuel-efficient jet, the New York Times reported on March 23, 2019.

American Airlines, an exclusive buyer of Boeing 737s for more than a decade, said in 2011 that their next order of hundreds of jets would be the Airbus. Boeing responded that they could produce a jet that matched the Airbus' capabilities. In three months, Boeing was promising American Airlines a rejiggered 737 and called it the 737 Max. Development was rushed, safety steps were skipped.

All of Boeing was being rejiggered, not just the 737. Cost cutting and cutbacks were the rule in order to maximize profits. Airlines flying the Boe-



ing jets began to complain about the quality of the jets they were receiving.

The specific issues described by numerous airlines were consistent. "KLM Royal Dutch Airlines described the factory's quality control as 'way below acceptable standards' when talking about a new 787-10 delivered in spring. Among several issues noted were loose seats, missing and incorrectly installed pins, nuts and bolts not fully tightened, and a fuel-line clamp left unsecured," Business Insider reported.

On Dec. 20, 2019, a test run of the Starliner capsule that Boeing built for NASA failed to reach the Space Station. "The NASA source said eight or more thrusters on the service module failed at one point and that one thruster never fired at all," according to an Ars Technica report.

Another report concluded: "Not one of Boeing's large projects seem to be without significant problems. The company has disgruntled its suppliers, its workforce, its customers and its regulators. This is the outcome of a 20 year process that changed the company culture into one where cost cutting and shareholder value were the highest priority. It will take years to change that back into one where good engineering and safety are the most valued attributes."

"With the 737 Max, Boeing put profits first and hundreds died," ProPublica reported on Nov. 11, 2019.

## 400 unsaleable 737 Max jets

In January 2020, Boeing finally shut down its 737 production line. It had more than 400 unsaleable 737 Max jets sitting in its parking lot, at an estimated cost of at least \$1.5 billion

a month. The total loss due to the 737 Max failure is now estimated to be \$30 billion.

At that time, Congress had already given Boeing untold billions in the Pentagon budget that was signed by Donald Trump on Dec. 20, 2019. Rep. Rashida Tlaib, one of just seven Democrats to vote against the trillion-dollar spending plan, said, "These are huge checks being written to Boeing and Lockheed Martin, when we should be cutting checks to everyday people struggling to make ends meet."

Boeing and Lockheed Martin are the two top arms manufacturers in the world. They are the top two of the five corporations that get 90 percent of the Pentagon contracts. The other three are Raytheon, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics. The five together are the infamous military-industrial complex.

Until the second 737 Max crash on March 10, 2019, in Ethiopia, which killed all passengers and revealed the jet's instability, Trump had Patrick Shanahan, a Boeing senior vice president, sitting at the head of the Pentagon: Secretary of Defense (Department of War). The Department of War was established by George Washington in 1789 but was renamed "Department of Defense" in 1947 at the beginning of the Cold War in an attempt to obscure its purpose.

The late Senate Armed Services Chair John McCain (R-Ariz.) was among those expressing qualms about Shanahan's ties to Boeing during the confirmation hearing, Politico reported. "I am concerned that 90 percent of defense spending is in the hands of five corporations, of which you represent one," McCain told Shanahan. "I have to have confidence that the fox is not gonna be put back into the hen house."

## A crisis of capitalism

Boeing was already in trouble.

The aircraft industry was in a crisis of oversupply, as the business press put it, which was relieved

*Continued on page 7*

# Maryland grocery worker who wanted to help seniors dies of Covid-19

By Sharon Black

Twenty-seven-year-old Leilani Jordan told her mother, Zenobia Shepard, "Mommy, I'm going to work because no one else is going to help the senior citizens get their groceries."

Jordan worked at the Giant Food at the Campus Way South store, in Largo, Md. She was a greeter. Her mother described to local TV station WUSA9 how Jordan had worked at the Giant store for six years as part of a disability program. "She loved her little job," and "She did whatever they needed to help people."

In late March, Leilani Jordan became ill, was eventually diagnosed as being positive for Covid-19 and

was hospitalized at Walter Reed Medical Center. Before she was placed on a ventilator, she called her mother, telling her, "Mommy, I can barely breathe." On April 1 she died.

In a recent article, published in the Atlantic magazine, Ibram X Kendi documents how the virus has disproportionately impacted Black and Brown people.

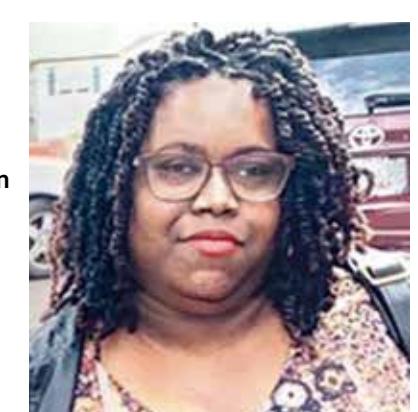
Jordan is not the only grocery and retail worker to die.

Walmart workers' rights group, United for Respect, reported that in Illinois, Walmart workers Phillip Thomas, 48, and Wando Evans, 51, both of whom worked at a store in Evergreen Park near Chicago, died in late March. In addition, a Trader Joe's worker in Scarsdale, N.Y., died.

The United Food and Commercial Workers Union has been demanding that Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan designate grocery workers as first responders so that they can receive personal protective equipment.

In Maryland, two Amazon warehouses have already reported positive cases of coronavirus, one at the Baltimore location and two other cases at the Sparrow's Point warehouse. Baltimore and Maryland Amazon workers have initiated a petition and Amazon has responded, but on a scale that workers describe as being far too limited.

The company is now doing temperature checks. But in one case, a worker reported that the company distributed cleaning supplies and



Leilani Jordan

some masks for the first floor of the building, where management resides, but on the second, third and fourth floor, no one has received supplies.

Workers have also developed the hashtag #STRIKEdontdie, which expresses their sentiments at being unrecognized front-line workers whose lives are being sacrificed to preserve the profits of the companies they work for without adequate hazard pay or the power to control their working conditions.

# Webinar unites groups to fight capitalism's coronavirus crisis

By Daniel G. Cardwell  
and Greg Butterfield

At the national webinar "Defending People During the Coronavirus Crisis" on March 28, organizers from across the U.S. spoke about their struggle on the front lines of a humanitarian catastrophe magnified by the capitalist response to Covid-19.

Health care workers, delivery drivers, Amazon workers, housing representatives and advocates in defense of prisoners and migrants joined activists fighting against racism and repression to discuss steps to defend their communities and build unity.

The event was initiated by the Baltimore Peoples Power Assembly and the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice in Los Angeles. More than a hundred people attended, representing diverse communities and sectors of the working class across the U.S.

Besides sharing experiences and perspectives, organizers aimed to begin building a national people's defense network to support the struggles that are sure to emerge in the weeks and months ahead. People have begun taking action in response to the lack of adequate health care and job safety, and an economic crisis that has already thrown millions out of work.

**Mahtowin Munro** of United American Indians of New England opened the webinar with a land acknowledgement, urging attendees to remember that we live on stolen Indigenous lands. Government officials are "exploiting the land, and they're handing out lands and contracts as favors to all their capitalist corporate allies."

Munro reported that the Trump regime's Interior Department had just informed the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe that their reservation land would be "taken back from them in the middle of this unprecedented pandemic."

This crisis "has completely washed the makeup off of the decayed face of capitalism," she said. "It is clear to thousands more every day that capitalism considers all of our communities utterly expendable and wants to kill us, just as it has been clear to Indigenous people for centuries that settler colonialism considers us expendable."

**Frank Chapman** of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression spoke of "the crisis before the crisis." He said, "The pandemic crisis did not create the crisis we have in the health system. It was there when it came. We already had over 140 million people living in poverty. We already had 500,000 people who are homeless, including children."

"The prisons are going to be turned into death camps for our people unless we unite and organize a very intense struggle to get people out," Chapman explained. "This should

be a period in which we demand and insist on the depopulation of the prison population. We must demand that everybody be let out, not based on what their criteria is, but based on our criteria."

He concluded: "The coronavirus has no prejudice. It has no class outlook. It has no race. It has no nationality. It infects and kills human beings. But those who make policies in our country — they do have prejudices, and they do have a class interest."

## Challenges for worker organizers

Speakers acknowledged the challenges of organizing in the new conditions created by the pandemic. In many places it is now impossible to organize protests or mass meetings. Much of the work must be educational and preparatory in character, to get ready for the day when it is possible for the people to take to the streets again. In the meantime, maximum creativity is needed to find other ways to struggle.

**Meg Maloney** of the New Orleans Hospitality Workers Alliance said, "The closures are necessary to stop the spread of the virus, but we can't leave workers in the dust." She explained that her group is building a coalition of workers and organizations around a series of popular demands to local government, such as the expansion of unemployment benefits to migrant workers and gig workers.

"All workers, whether in health care or in food delivery, need PPE [personal protective equipment]. Whatever solutions are going to come forth are going to come from the people, from the workers."

**Rasika Ruwanpathirana**, an Amazon warehouse worker in Baltimore, drew on his own experience as an immigrant, explaining that his family in Sri Lanka is under quarantine, meaning people are not even allowed to leave their houses. He has no choice but to keep working here to support them.

Baltimore and Maryland Amazon workers have drawn up a list of five demands and launched a petition campaign, he reported. Some of those demands were won during the first week of April as Amazon and Whole Foods workers from Staten Island, N.Y., to Detroit staged protests and walkouts.

**Fernando Figueroa**, a UPS Teamster in Jacksonville, Fla., explained, "People are getting sick at various UPS facilities around the country. Believe it or not, we have no personal protective equipment available for workers even though we're handling thousands of boxes every day, and hundreds of drivers are driving all over the city."

"There are four main demands that we're pushing," Figueroa said. "We think that all nonessential businesses should be closed immediately. We think that no workers should lose income as a result of this



Sharon Black and John Parker co-chaired the webinar.

crisis. We think that every worker who has to work needs to be kept as safe as possible. We also think that every person should get hazard pay if you're still being forced to work through this crisis.

"The only people that are going to liberate us, who're going to improve our lives, are ourselves, banding together. And we're really trying to push that message."

## Mutual aid and political pressure

**The Rev. Annie Chambers** of the Peoples Power Assembly, and tenant representative at the Baltimore Douglas Homes public housing development, explained that "I have been distributing food and asking organizations to help me. We have got no relief from the city or the state." Providing food and water, milk and baby formula for the residents of public housing is a constant fight, she said, and caregivers and family members are prevented from visiting elders who live in highrise buildings.

"Residents are having trouble even trying to get their medications," Rev. Chambers said, "because they don't have their copayment or because they are not even allowing us into the hospital now. They've got the National Guard guarding the hospitals, so if you don't go in by ambulance you don't get in. And they're picking and choosing who they take, and if they don't pick you, you don't get health care."

**Ron Gochez** of Unión del Barrio said: "About a year and a half ago or so, the mayor in Oakland, Calif., warned the people when they found out that ICE raids were going to happen. So that's something we want the mayor here in Los Angeles to do. If there's any kind of confirmed ICE activity within the city boundaries, then the city itself should alert the residents. That's something we can put pressure on officials all over the country to do as well."

Gochez said his group was producing informational videos to counter misinformation. "We want to inform the community not only with the attacks of coronavirus, but also the attacks of capitalism on our communities," he concluded.

**Nana Gyamfi** of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration spoke about the importance of freeing migrants in detention centers, pointing out that 20 percent of those in detention are Black people, many hailing from the Caribbean. "Nothing will move unless we make it move," she said.

**Pam Africa** of MOVE and International Concerned Family & Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal spoke about RAPP (Release Aging People in Prison), which has been successful in getting prisoners released — includ-

ing political prisoners — based on health issues of older people. "That's a strategy we can use," she said.

**Terri Kay** of the People's Alliance reported on an array of actions in the Bay Area, including a victorious struggle in Oakland for a moratorium on evictions. "People have very understandable concerns about the deployment of the National Guard across the country and the possibility of martial law, as well as abuse of voting rights."

**Irving McQueen** of Pan African Community Action in Washington, D.C., drew attention to the plight of Black and Brown workers in the capital: "Public transit is shut down. People are unable to move around the city for groceries or to seek medical care." He explained that there are survival programs in the Parkland Heights area to help distribute resources and necessities, but that it is crucial that these efforts be accompanied by education to explain to our communities that the capitalist class can't meet our needs. "Only we can, through socialism."

## Crisis of imperialism & neoliberalism



**Bernadette Ellorin** of BAYAN USA said capitalist governments around the world are using the pandemic "as an opportunity to advance a fascist agenda."

In the Philippines, U.S.-backed President Rodrigo Duterte imposed a mandatory quarantine and curfew. To suppress the mass movement, Duterte is charging government critics with curfew violations and other trumped-up charges, "taking a militarist approach rather than a medical approach."

"Disease and illness are a fact of life, but imperialism and neoliberalism — those are the real crises," said Ellorin.



**Berta Joubert-Ceci** of the Puerto Rico Tribunal and Struggle-La Lucha newspaper was on the line from Puerto Rico: "We have had two natural disasters, with two unnatural, terrible responses from the government," she

said. Puerto Rico, a U.S. colony, has yet to recover from Washington's negligent response after hurricanes and earthquakes ravaged the country's people and infrastructure.

"Like the Philippines and all over the world, more skilled workers and professionals migrate out of the country to escape the despondent living conditions created by imperialism, leaving behind few skilled workers to complete the work of recovery. Skilled workers like nurses are an 'export,'" Joubert-Ceci explained. Test kits and treatments from nearby Cuba are blocked in Puerto Rico, as they are in the U.S.

*Continued on the next page*

# World's biggest drug pusher indicts Venezuela

By Stephen Millies

On March 26, Trump's attorney general, William Barr, said that Venezuela's president, Nicolás Maduro Moros, was "flooding" the United States with cocaine. Three days later, President Trump claimed that health care workers risking their lives fighting the coronavirus were stealing face masks and reselling them.

Both statements are outrageous lies.

In the midst of a pandemic, Barr announced a \$15 million reward for the capture of the democratically elected Venezuelan president. Ten million dollars was offered for the leader of the country's Constituent Assembly, Diosdado Cabello.

Barr heads the same Justice Department that refused to bring federal civil rights charges against the cop who strangled Eric Garner, whose last words were, "I can't breathe."

Barr's news conference featured a wanted poster for President Maduro. The only thing missing on it were the words "dead or alive."

Venezuela's leader denounced these "racist cowboy methods." President Maduro said that his country "had record numbers of drug busts in the past 15 years, ever since we got rid of the [U.S.] Drug Enforcement Agency."

If the capitalist government was honest about who's flooding the U.S. with drugs, it would have indicted itself.

The 2017 hit movie "American

Made," starring Tom Cruise as the number one drug smuggler, Barry Seal, missed a key detail. When Seal was murdered on Feb. 19, 1986, he carried the personal phone number of then vice president, George Herbert Walker Bush.

The son of a Ku Klux Klan member, Seal was a longtime pilot for the CIA and Trans World Airlines. As a teenager, he was in the Civil Air Patrol with JFK assassination figures Lee Harvey Oswald and David Ferrie.

Some believe Seal is seen with future CIA director Porter Goss in a famous picture of "Operation 40" members. This was a CIA unit that organized terrorist actions against socialist Cuba. (See "Barry and the Boys" by Daniel Hopsicker.)

Barry Seal flew a plane equipped with CIA cameras into Nicaragua in an attempt to frame the revolutionary Sandinista government on drug charges. This scheme fell apart with the Wall Street Journal reporter Jonathan Kwitny showing there was no link between any Nicaraguan official and the staged drug shipment.

The current charges against leaders of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are just as phony.

## Uncle Sam sells crack

Barry Seal was conveniently rubbed out months before the Contra scandal broke out. On Oct. 5, 1986, CIA mercenary Eugene Hasen-

fus was shot down over Nicaragua.

The plane was owned by the CIA front, Southern Air Transport, whose employees included future Attorney General William Barr.

Hasenfus confessed that he was dropping off supplies to Contra terrorists trying to overthrow Nicaragua's government. According to the late Father Miguel D'Escoto, who was Nicaragua's foreign minister, the Contras murdered 30,000 people.

Elliot Abrams was the Reagan administration's godfather for all the U.S.-backed death squads in Central America, including the Contras. Today, this war criminal is the point-person for Trump's undeclared war against Venezuela.

After Vietnam, people in the U.S. didn't want another dirty war. The House of Representatives prohibited aid to the Contras.

The Reagan administration ignored Congress and poured crack cocaine into Los Angeles to finance the Contras. A key player was Marine Col. Oliver North, whose own secretary, Fawn Hall, became addicted.

The crack epidemic devastated Black and Latinx communities. It served as an excuse for the prison population increasing seven times between 1980 and 2020.

Courageous journalist Gary Webb exposed this CIA drug pushing in his newspaper series "Dark Alliance." Webb was run out of journal-

ism for telling the truth and driven to suicide, as seen in the 2014 film "Kill the Messenger."

In 1972, the CIA tried to block the publication of "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia" by Alfred W. McCoy. This classic work revealed the vast CIA drug running operations in Southeast Asia that flooded Black and Latinx communities with heroin. Transporting this poison was CIA front Air America with 20,000 employees.

This sordid history didn't prevent Attorney General Barr from also announcing drug peddling indictments against leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia/Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC).

The FARC has been leading a struggle against the death squad regime in Colombia for almost 60 years. Even after a peace agreement was signed in 2017, hundreds of labor and community activists have been murdered.

Colombia produces an estimated 43 percent of world cocaine production. That's a good reason why the government is receiving \$10 billion in U.S. military aid over 15 years.

The drug charges against President Maduro and the FARC leaders are phony but dangerous. They could serve as an excuse for U.S. military intervention against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. U.S. hands off Venezuela! ☈

# A new humanity, a new world

Owei Lakemfa is the former secretary general of the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), a coalition of trade unions in all the 54 African countries, with a total membership of about 25 million.

## By Owei Lakemfa

Imagine. Imagine you are on a cruise ship with 681 others and then discover that some of them have contracted a highly infectious virus that has neither cure nor vaccine. Even if there were a cure, it was not within reach as you are afloat in the ocean and no country wanted you to berth. So your ship becomes not just a prison but a virus-infected laboratory with no escape except to leap into the roaring waves. Therefore, you are condemned to wait and live in fear of the highly contagious virus spreading. It is a nightmare, but not one you can wake up from, as it is a reality running into weeks.

That was the nerve-wracking experience passengers on board the British cruise ship MS Braemar underwent. The passengers were 668 from the United Kingdom and the rest from Italy, Colombia, Australia, Canada, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Japan. On board, five had coronavirus Covid-19 while 28 other passengers and 27 crewmembers had been isolated after experiencing coronavirus-like symptoms.

The ship was denied docking by the Dominican Republic, Barbados and the Bahamas. The mighty United States was not offering any assistance, but the small island of Cuba, which is also experiencing the virus,

beckoned on the ship to dock at its port of Mariel as an act of solidarity.

The relieved passengers, throwing kisses at a country they were not scheduled to visit, were transported in a caravan of buses and ambulances to a Havana airport terminal and flown to the U.K.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab joined in the appreciation: "We are very grateful to the Cuban government for swiftly enabling this operation."

The Cuban action to the passengers and their loved ones is an unforgettable act of bravery which saved lives. That, in international diplomacy, is called soft power diplomacy. But knowing the Cubans, that was not their intention. Rather, it is in their character and tradition to come to the assistance of people in need even if it would cost them lives. That was what they did in the anti-cholera fight in Haiti, and in 2014 during the Ebola scourge that threatened to wipe out countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone.

We Africans can also not forget that in the 1980s, when apartheid held South Africa and Namibia in a strangulating grip and marched across Angola to seize that country, it was only Cuba that came to our aid, pouring in some 55,000 troops, losing thousands of their youths in battle, but effectively crushing the

apartheid military, leaving the racists with no option but to dismantle their evil system and grant Namibia and South Africa independence. In the last 56 years, Cuba has sent over 400,000 health professionals to work for free in 164 countries.

Italy is now the epicenter of the Covid-19 pandemic, with deaths in the past one week averaging four hundred. Almost all countries in the world are protecting just themselves and conserving their finances, health workers and medical supplies for their citizens. In contrast, tiny Cuba is mobilizing and sending thousands of its medical professionals to countries ravaged by Covid-19. Just this Saturday, it sent 52 doctors and nurses to Italy, a developed European country, to help battle the virus. Italy's Permanent Representative to the European Union (EU) Maurizio Massari had complained that his country's cry to EU member countries for medical help to combat coronavirus had gone unanswered.

The Cuban deployment of its "armies of white robes" to Italy was the sixth international medical brigade it was sending out to fight Covid-19. It had sent them to Grenada, Nicaragua, Suriname, Venezuela and Jamaica.

When the 140 Cuban medical professionals arrived in Kingston, Jamaican Health Minister Christopher Tufton greeted them thus: "In a time of crisis, the Cuban government, the Cuban people ... have risen to the occasion, they have heard our appeal and they have responded."

The Cubans are dogged fighters

## The Social Evolution of Humanity

Marx and Engels were right! by Bob McCubbin

[tinyurl.com/vwarcv7](http://tinyurl.com/vwarcv7)

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## Webinar Unites

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**Lucy Pagoada** of Dept. 19, North American chapter, Popular National Liberation Front (FNRN) of Honduras, and a public school teacher, described Honduras as a "narco colony" of Washington, where the head of state, illegally installed through U.S. intervention, is a drug trafficker whose brother is being tried in New York for smuggling. Bringing attention to the bogus drug charges that Trump has leveled against Venezuelan officials, including President Nicolás Maduro, Pagoada charged: "The U.S. sets up its own narco states, then projects its crimes onto anti-imperialist countries to justify intervention."

The webinar was co-chaired by **John Parker** of the Harriet Tubman Center and **Sharon Black** of the PPA. Participants agreed to continue sharing information, support each others' local efforts and build events together, starting with a national webinar and press conference on April 4, the 52nd anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. The focus will be on fighting racism during the coronavirus crisis, from attacks on Asian Americans to repression of Black and Brown communities.

Pam Africa summed up the success of the webinar. She exclaimed, "This is really a great call! I've been taking notes and got a lot of great ideas. It came to my head that I need to organize my block. We have to get to know people and get them involved in the movement. I want to be a person who can direct them to different things." ☈

# Solidarity with Sri Lankan migrant workers fleeing Italy

By Rasika Ruwanpathirana

In the wake of Covid-19, countries around the world are moving to close their borders and locking their citizens in their homes in an attempt to stop or slow down the infection. For the past few days, my Facebook feed has been full of disturbingly unfriendly, unwelcome posts about Sri Lankan nationals coming home and risking the country's well-being. Those running away from Italy, the new coronavirus hotspot, are especially highlighted.

This is particularly heartbreaking because many of these migrant workers are undocumented, spent their life savings on smugglers and risked their lives in order to get to their destination. After getting to Italy, they have to live in the darkness and in fear, every day, of being caught and deported, not to mention exploited, raped, robbed and unable to report it or defend themselves.

## History of undocumented Sri Lankan migrant workers in Italy

Sri Lankan migrants have been traveling to Italy since the 1970s. In the past, Italy has been deeply nationalist and not allowed foreign nationals, specifically non-Europeans, to settle down. Yet it allows migrant workers to work in the dark in order to exploit their cheap labor.

I remember growing up in Sri Lanka in the 1980s and 1990s. People I knew in the village and city would come home from Italy with new electronics and refrigerators and, of course, show off Italian-fashion clothing. This was the time Sri Lanka barely had its electric grid in place. Many of us didn't have electricity in the house.

Over the years, it has become harder and harder to travel to Italy, mainly because, like any other Western nation, it had heightened its border security and started cracking down on undocumented migration. So the travel becomes more deadly by the day, as we hear many horror stories of people traveling inside shipping containers, etc.

## Boeing 747 hijacking case of Sepala Ekanayake

There was the famous case of Sepala Ekanayake, a Sri Lankan national who was married to a Italian national. They had a child. Ekanayake was denied a visa to stay in Italy and told he couldn't get one for six years. When he took the desperate measures to hijack an Alitalia Boeing 747 and demanded the return of his partner and child on June 30, 1982, Sri Lanka didn't have a law to prosecute Sri Lankan nationals in case of a hijack.

When the Italian government demanded the extradition of Ekanayake, the public rose against it. The Sri Lankan government had to pass a new law and make it retroactive in order to prosecute Ekanayake in the homeland. He was sent to jail for 40 years and was never allowed to see his partner and child again.

The reason I'm highlighting this case is to show the extent of the racism the Italian government carried

A group of Sri Lankans released from military quarantine board a bus on March 29, 2020.

out over the decades towards migrant workers.

## Migrant workers, legal vs. 'illegal'

I moved to the U.S. in 2000, winning the diversity green card lottery. In the legal sense, I had some form of defense since I had residency. Nevertheless, I was told to keep my head down, don't question authority and do my work without question, because I could lose my privileges at any time without warning. A simple case of arrest could cause denial of renewing visas.

Many of my countrymen have taken Western names in order for them to be more acceptable in the working environment. During my citizenship interview in 2008, the agent repeatedly asked me if I wanted to change my name. He insisted that I would have an easier time if I did so. I have experienced denial of employment/callbacks because of it. Most of the time my roommates who had Western names, if applying for the same job, did get a callback.

I was stopped by the Los Angeles Police Department multiple times while riding my bicycle to work and to college because I was going through a certain neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley. I was denied work as a food service worker in the aftermath of 9/11 because I "looked like Osama." Not to mention denial of visitor visas to immediate members of my family, whose only crime was living in a Third World country. This is, by definition, family separation and a violation of basic human rights. This was my experience as a so-called legal worker.

While I was living in Los Angeles, I saw many hundreds of undocumented migrant workers who wait in Home Depot parking lots looking for day labor. Seeing them never affected me the way it does now, because I was always struggling to get my own life going and didn't really have the time to open my eyes. Truth is, the cycle I was pumped into didn't allow me to see beyond what I was "supposed" to see.

## A visit to Italy

In 2011, during my college years, I had the opportunity to spend some time in Milan, Italy. Milan is now much more diverse, and younger generations of Milanese have welcomed this diversity. Nevertheless, you could still find those who live the invisible life in every corner.

I immediately started to recognize fellow countrymen. I could see how difficult life was just by seeing their behavior, how much they were being ignored by the residents there, who most of the time acted annoyed by them. I immediately drew parallels to migrant workers in the U.S.

Whenever I introduced myself to a stranger and saw their facial expression change when they found out I was from Sri Lanka, it made me feel very uncomfortable and strange. I knew exactly why they reacted differently. I started claiming "I'm from Los Angeles" just to avoid the awkwardness.



## Cuba

The news of the Cuban government letting a British cruise ship infected with Covid-19 dock is being shared through social media. Cuba, with all the difficulties of dealing with the U.S. embargo, has been the champion of the working class when it comes to providing health care to its own people and sending out an army of doctors internationally in crises like this. It's because, by definition, they understand the responsibility of a government to take care of its citizens and the well-being of its international compatriates. We can learn a lot from them.

If one looks closely at how Cuba runs its society, you would know they are nothing like so-called authoritarians but rather a genuine democracy with popularly elected officials. The difference is, their elections are not run by money from the corporations and the oil industry.

If you have seen the news lately, you know Cuban doctors have arrived in Italy to help handle the dire situation.

## Sri Lanka

It is clear that the Sri Lankan government was not prepared early enough to get a hold of the situation. Closing borders and implementing curfews can help slow the spread of the virus, but what are the human choices we can make during a crisis like this?

At this point, we should consider Sri Lanka as a nation of migrant workers. There's practically no one there who doesn't have a family member who lives in another country or personally knows someone who lives abroad. While Western nations drain our natural resources and recruit the most skilled citizens, most of the others who leave by themselves to find better conditions do bring something back home.

There are many reports of Sri Lankan citizens returning home from Italy and going into hiding. Fear has grown that they are spreading the virus by doing so. So they might be. However, it is the government's responsibility to make them feel comfortable and educate the masses so they don't have a fear of being prosecuted or unfairly targeted, so they can come out and get treated, and so they can be isolated humanely.

We still have time to make things right. It is our responsibility to demand that we make things right and educate when our government doesn't get things right. It is also our responsibility to create a government that willingly listens and makes changes demanded by the people.

# ROSEMARY NEIDENBERG

## a century of revolutionary struggle

By Greg Butterfield

Rosemary Neidenberg died in Brooklyn, N.Y., on March 29 at the age of 99. For almost a century, her commitment to the revolutionary liberation of humanity never faltered. She was also one of the kindest, funniest, most thoughtful and hardworking people I ever knew.

Comrade Rosie was born just three years after the Russian Revolution and lived through most of the major events of the 20th century. Through the decades, she was also at the center of building an independent Marxist current in the belly of U.S. imperialism, from the harshest days of the 1950s anti-communist witch-hunt to the defense of Black Liberation fighters Mae Mallory and Robert F. Williams, from the 1970s Food Is A Right campaign led by women of Youth Against War and Fascism to ensuring the uninterrupted distribution of Marxist agitation in the difficult years following the destruction of the USSR.

She did it all in her modest, mostly behind the scenes, yet utterly indispensable way.

To give just one example of her far-reaching influence, consider that Bob McCubbin, author of the groundbreaking "Roots of Lesbian and Gay Oppression: A Marxist View," recently wrote that Rosemary Neidenberg "won me to communism."

In the dedication to his newest book, "The Social Evolution of Humanity: Marx and Engels were Right!", McCubbin said: "Rosemary Neidenberg (b. 1921) is a lifelong communist and founding member of Workers World Party, whose anger at imperialism remains undiminished and whose vision of a socialist future for humankind is uncompromised after many decades of struggle with the goal of the establishment of workers' power here in the world center of capitalism."

Lallan Schoenstein recalled:

"Rosemary was an inspiration personally and politically. My first encounter with her was in 1970,

when I volunteered to help with a large mailing that rallied support for the Black Panthers, 'Stop the War against Black America.'

"Rosemary was sitting at a long table among 20 or so people who were all decades younger than her. It wasn't only her bright cheerful colors, but her animated, friendly attention that made her the only person I remember from that day. That first impression was later sealed by her political savvy and dependable support.

"It was impressive to see an older woman who didn't seem aged," Schoenstein said. "At first I wasn't even aware of the significant difficulties she endured from a childhood bout with polio. Her dignity and self-esteem appeared to be generated by profound confidence that the tedium of the work she was responsible for would have a socially revolutionary impact."

"I'll always remember Rosie as the most loving and accepting revolutionary I know," said Lizz Toledo. "After years of my being inactive at the national level, when she saw me at a meeting, she hugged me tight without questions, judgements or reprimands. She was just happy to see me. We shared a very touching, intimate moment as she whispered in my ear, 'So happy to see you are back, we need you.'"

That was Rosemary. She valued every comrade, their partners, their children. She was a devoted parent and grandparent herself, together with her life partner, Comrade Milt Neidenberg, who died in February 2018.

As for me, I met Rosie in 1990, when I moved to New York City fresh out of high school and determined to become a revolutionary. As a naive kid raised in rural Wisconsin, I could have run into a lot of problems inside or outside the struggle. Rosemary was one of the comrades who took an interest in me and helped steer me in the best direction. She was warm, witty and so kind that her sometimes sarcastic, always spot-on personal observations never seemed mean-spirited.

## \$2 trillion slush fund for Wall Street

*Continued from page 3*

somewhat when the Boeing 737 Max was grounded. And reports said that the possible return of the 737 Max jet to the market would trigger a crisis. "There could potentially be as many as 1,000 surplus aircraft next year," Reuters reported.

The business press has been speculating about possible bankruptcy for months. This bailout might be comparable to the one the government did for General Motors in 2009, except this bailout isn't being done as an investment. It's a giveaway! Trump has said over the last few weeks that the federal government is going to step in and "help Boeing."

The \$2 trillion bailout passed by Congress and signed by Trump is not about fighting the coronavirus or helping the working class. The capitalist system was already on the edge of a bust.

Homelessness has reached record levels. The Coalition for the Home-

less reported last year that the number of homeless in New York City had reached an all-time record high of 133,284.

The auto industry is also in a crisis. As CNBC reported last November, "Global car sales expected to slide by 3.1 million this year in steepest drop since the Great Recession."

With an overproduction crisis that has plagued Big Oil since at least 2018, a price war pushing oil down toward \$20 a barrel from \$60 a barrel three months ago triggered the March 9 stock market nosedive.

Workers' pay is at record lows, income inequality at record highs. Forty-four percent of all U.S. workers are in poverty, not even a living wage.

The \$2 trillion bailout is a giveaway to the rich, who're in a panic over the crashing capitalist system. It won't stop the crash, the layoffs, the loss of homes, or the general instability and suffering for the working class and oppressed peoples in the U.S. □

### A socialist youth

Rosemary joined the working-class movement as a high-school student in the industrial city of Buffalo, N.Y., during the mighty struggles of the Great Depression. She was fortunate to be on the ground floor of the revolutionary Marxist tendency led by Sam Marcy, Dorothy Ballan and Vince Copeland, which first took shape within the Buffalo branch of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and later founded Workers World Party (WWP) in 1959. They, in turn, were fortunate to have her revolutionary work ethic and charm in their corner.

In the summer of 2018, I interviewed Rosemary about her early experiences in the political struggle. She followed up by writing a brief account filling in more details. Here I share some of that conversation, as much as possible in her own words:

Rosemary Rook was part of a large Catholic family. They lived in her grandmother's house. Her grandfather had been killed in an industrial accident at the flour mill where he worked before Rosie was born.

Rosie's grandmother would tell the story every time a new person came to the house. This made a very deep impact on her consciousness. Also, she recalled that one of her uncles was mercilessly hounded by the police for having stood up to them.

Rosie was struck with polio at age 7. Another uncle taught her to ride a bicycle despite her disability. She was able to pedal with one foot and push down the second, immobilized leg to keep going. Eventually, she was able to ride all over town, even up hills, in this fashion.

In high school, Rosie had a history teacher who recommended socially conscious literature, like the books of Upton Sinclair. She wrote: "Buffalo, N.Y., circa 1938. Fosdick-Masten High School. Cast: progressive history teachers Maurice B. Rovner and M. Rowen. Students Rosemary Rook, Rovner's class, and Pearl Kessler, Rowen's class, looking for a socialist organization. Artie Copeland, Rowen's class, brother to actor Vincent Copeland, on tour with renowned Buffalo actress Katherine Cornell."

Rosie continued: "Vinnie had been a Communist Party member or sympathizer, but had been introduced to the work of [Russian revolutionary Leon] Trotsky while performing in Arden, Del., by Libby [Elizabeth Ross]. (Libby and Vinnie had fallen irreversibly in love.) Vinnie wrote political letters to his family. Artie brought one to Rowen's history class, who shared it with Rovner's class. Rosemary and Pearl were very impressed. Asked to meet Vinnie, and did. Much mutual admiration took place."

At the time, Vince Copeland was performing on Broadway. Rosie and her friend Pearl went to meet Vince when he came back to Buffalo to perform in a play there. He invited them to visit him at his parent's house. This is where their political association began.

"Previously, Rosemary and Pearl, looking for socialism, had joined a Socialist Labor Party (SLP) study class held at the beautiful Grosvenor Library (where I later worked). At one



WW PHOTO: BRENDA RYAN

session, a new member appeared, Frank St. George. He looked like a live one and as he sat opposite me to fill out an application for the class, I read his address upside down. I gave this address to Vinnie."

### A base in Buffalo

When Copeland returned to Buffalo for another play, he decided to set up a branch of the SWP. You needed five people to start a branch. He recruited Frank St. George, who recruited another three of the St. George brothers. "There were five brothers total from a large Italian family. The younger brothers all did what Frank told them to do. One of the younger brothers was quite militant though," Rosemary explained.

"Much to my surprise and pleasure, the next time we saw Vinnie, there was an SWP branch in Buffalo." Rosie and Pearl soon joined too.

"Vinnie had left the stage and soon brought Libby and her 4-year-old daughter Deirdre to Buffalo and introduced me to them. [We] quickly became closer than family."

"So the first SWP branch in Buffalo — created by a series of fortunate coincidences."

Rosie also recalled when Milt Neidenberg moved to Buffalo — the third in a group of young Jewish veterans who came from New York City after World War II, looking for work and to be politically active.

The Buffalo comrades were then campaigning in defense of Willie McGee, an African American man who was sentenced to death in Mississippi on a false charge of raping a white woman. Large protests were organized in many cities. Although the movement was unable to stop McGee's eventual execution in 1951, the protests reduced the number of legal lynchings and helped force the passing of anti-lynching legislation.

Rosie said she knew she was in love with Milt when she saw him at a street meeting for Willie McGee in the Black community. Two young women from the community came and spoke. She remembered seeing Milt handing out fliers in a very respectful way: "He was very dashing."

She also recalled buying a lot of Marxist books afterward, chuckling that it was "a dowry" as part of her plan to win his affections. She was successful, she said, but after so many years couldn't remember if the books helped!

Today, the members and supporters of Struggle-La Lucha newspaper and the Socialist Unity Party work to carry forward the revolutionary ideas and traditions established by Sam Marcy, Dorothy Ballan and Vince Copeland in the modern conditions of decayed, crisis-ridden capitalism. As we do so, we proudly uphold the example of revolutionary worker Rosemary Neidenberg as one to aspire to.

Comrade Rosemary Neidenberg, ipresente! □

From a June 9, 2013, talk by Fred Goldstein at the Left Forum, a yearly event in New York City. The talk was focused on socialism and China in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008. Although the details of what is happening now are different, the social and economic forces have not changed. The conclusion is also unchanged: there must be a firm defense of China against every scheme by imperialism and by the domestic capitalist class in China to undermine the socialist foundation that still exists there.

# Marxism and the social character of China

**By Fred Goldstein**

The issue of China is one of the most important questions of the 21st century for the working class and the oppressed peoples, as well as the hostile imperialist ruling classes of the world.

The progressive and revolutionary movements, especially in the U.S., have a great stake in arriving at a correct policy toward China.

First of all, China is a formerly oppressed country that achieved liberation from British, French, German, U.S. and Japanese imperialism in 1949 by making one of the greatest revolutions in history. At that time, one quarter of the human race was torn from the clutches of imperialism. As a formerly oppressed country struggling for national development, it must be defended against all varieties of imperialist military, economic and political aggression, regardless of what one thinks about its social character.

China today is a new, complex and contradictory phenomenon in history. It has fundamental socialist structures alongside capitalist development and imperialist penetration. The leadership calls it "market socialism" or socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Socialism is inscribed firmly as China's foundation in its constitution. The international capitalist class is profoundly hostile to China and never ceases to try to undermine its fundamental socialist structures.

Yet workers in Chinese private industry are subjected to capitalist exploitation and the workers in the state industries have lost much of the economic support that once attached to their workplaces. Horrendous industrial accidents take place and environmental problems are severe.

## Dual character of China's economic foundation

Only Marxism enables us to approach an analysis of China.

Marxism has shown that the character of any society is determined by its economic foundation and that the superstructure of society, its politics, ideology, etc., are determined by the economic foundation.

How can such an analysis be applied to China and how can it help to clarify how to view China?

To begin with, the economic foundation of China is not homogeneous. It is partly socialist and partly capitalist. The question for us and for the world working class is: Which is dominant? — the socialist foundation, or the capitalist enterprises seeking private accumulation of profit through the exploitation of the working class?

Similarly, the superstructure is not homogeneous. On the one hand, there are the Communist Party, the People's Liberation Army and the ideological doctrine that declares socialism to be the foundation of



A cultural presentation in Chongqing, China.

China. On the other hand, there is the relentless promotion of opening up to imperialism and capitalist market reforms. And, above all, there is a struggle over political reform, meaning the right for the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie to organize politically, either inside the party, outside the party or both. There is a steady drumbeat for "political reform" from the imperialists and their class allies inside China.

## Economic crisis of 2008-2009 was a critical test

How can we assess this situation? We should start by empirical examination of China, on the one hand, and the rest of the capitalist world on the other.

A critical test came when the Chinese leadership was forced to deal with the effects of the worst capitalist crisis since World War II.

When the crisis hit in 2008 to 2009, many tens of millions of workers in the U.S., Europe, Japan and across the capitalist world were plunged into unemployment.

China, which had dangerously allowed itself to become heavily dependent on exports to the capitalist West, suddenly was faced with the shutdown of thousands of factories, primarily in the eastern coastal provinces and the special economic zones.

More than 20 million Chinese workers lost their jobs in a very short time.

So what did the Chinese government do?

We described what happened in a pamphlet titled "The Suppression of Bo Xilai and the Capitalist Road — Can Socialism Be Revived in China?" in an article titled "Capitalist crisis versus planning." The article, published on March 27, 2012, explained that plans drafted as far back as 2003, to go into effect in future years, were pushed forward and implemented.

We then quoted from Nicholas Lardy, a bourgeois China expert from the prestigious Peterson Institute for International Economics, who described how consumption in China actually grew during the crisis of 2008-2009, wages went up, and the government created enough jobs to compensate for the layoffs caused by the global crisis.

Said Lardy: "In a year in which

GDP expansion [in China] was the slowest in almost a decade, how could consumption growth in 2009 have been so strong in relative terms? How could this happen at a time when employment in export-oriented industries was collapsing, with a survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture reporting the loss of 20 million jobs in export manufacturing centers along the southeast coast, notably in Guangdong Province? The relatively strong growth of consumption in 2009 is explained by several factors.

First, the boom in investment, particularly in construction activities, appears to have generated additional employment sufficient to offset a very large portion of the job losses in the export sector. For the year as a whole, the Chinese economy created 11.02 million jobs in urban areas, very nearly matching the 11.13 million urban jobs created in 2008.

"Second, while the growth of employment slowed slightly, wages continued to rise. In nominal terms, wages in the formal sector rose 12 percent, a few percentage points below the average of the previous five years (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2010f, 131). In real terms the increase was almost 13 percent. Third, the government continued its programs of increasing payments to those drawing pensions and raising transfer payments to China's lowest-income residents. Monthly pension payments for enterprise retirees increased by RMB120, or 10 percent, in January 2009, substantially more than the 5.9 percent increase in consumer prices in 2008. This raised the total payments to retirees by about RMB75 billion. The Ministry of Civil Affairs raised transfer payments to about 70 million of China's lowest-income citizens by a third, for an increase of RMB20 billion in 2009 (Ministry of Civil Affairs 2010)."

He further explained that the Ministry of Railroads introduced eight specific plans, to be completed in 2020, to be implemented in the crisis. The World Bank called it "perhaps the biggest single planned program of passenger rail investment there has ever been in one country." In addition, ultrahigh-voltage grid projects were undertaken, among other advances.

The full article by Lardy can be found in "Sustaining China's Economic Growth after the Global Financial Crisis," Kindle Locations 664-666, Peterson Institute for International Economics.

## Socialist structures reversed collapse

So income went up, consumption went up and unemployment was overcome in China — all while the capitalist world was still mired in mass unemployment, austerity, recession, stagnation, slow growth and increasing poverty.

The reversal of the effects of the crisis in China is the direct result of national planning, state-owned enterprises, state-owned banking and the policy decisions of the Chinese Communist Party.

There was a crisis in China, and it was caused by the world capitalist crisis. The question was which principle would prevail in the face of mass unemployment — the rational, humane principle of planning or the capitalist market. In China the planning principle, the conscious element, took precedence over the anarchy of production brought about by the laws of the market and the law of labor value.

But the institutions based on the remaining structures of Chinese socialism, which saved the masses from economic disaster, are the very institutions that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, Wall Street and London want to reduce and eventually destroy. They are the state-owned enterprises, government planning and the control by the Chinese Communist Party.

One might say that the Chinese leadership did this to avoid unrest. Surely the capitalists in Europe and the U.S. also want to avoid unrest. But that did not cause them to put tens of millions of workers back to work, raise pensions, and raise stipends and social welfare payments. It only caused them to institute austerity to secure the profits of the bankers.

Coming back to Marxist analysis, it is clear from the way the Chinese leadership handled this crisis that the socialist side of the economic foundation is still dominant in China. And the same can be said for the political superstructure.

The enemies of socialism claim that capitalism is responsible for the great successes in China.

But that is a falsehood. China has succeeded in its economic development because the socialist sector has broadly contained domestic capitalism and imperialist investment within the framework of the national economic goals of the leadership.

Without that, China would look like India — which also has planning but is a thoroughly capitalist country.

In India, poverty is so deep that people live on garbage dumps, wash their clothes in polluted water, and the urban slums in Kolkata and Mumbai rival rural poverty. The masses of India are desperately poor — living on \$1 to \$2 a day — even as the glittering high-tech industry develops alongside the abysmal economic conditions faced by hundreds of millions of Indians.

There is no comparison with Chi-

Continued on the next page

# ICE uses pandemic to terrorize migrants

By Daniel G. Cardwell

As the profit system spins into crisis, workers across the country are forced to remain at home due to layoffs and measures to slow the spread of Covid-19. But it's business as usual for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). That is — they're ramping up efforts to detain and repress immigrants.

Despite its claims otherwise, ICE is expanding enforcement operations during the Covid-19 crisis. It has begun conducting 24-hour surveillance of the homes and workplaces of undocumented immigrants. According to the New York Times, hundreds of additional ICE officers are being deployed in unmarked cars to arrest migrants in sanctuary cities.

During a global pandemic, ICE is taking advantage of the virtual lockdown to track down its targets and make arrests.

To help keep its agents safe during this latest racist crackdown, ICE has ordered 45,000 surgical masks for its field offices from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Meanwhile, a shortage of masks still exists for health care workers who, working on the front lines against

the pandemic, are being instructed by the CDC to reuse their masks or use scarves for protection.

Now, U.S. border cops are bringing in their own hand soap and disinfectant wipes to sanitize their work areas. But just last fall, the U.S. government argued in court that children in ICE detention facilities are not entitled to basic sanitation, clean clothes, bathing or toothbrushes.

With mumps and measles outbreaks at ICE facilities in past years, and at least eight children dead from the heinous conditions of ICE detention centers, these prisons are proven hotspots for disease. As of March 28, there are just two confirmed cases of Covid-19 among ICE detainees. They are now being quarantined, as are nine other at-risk prisoners around the country.

But given the national shortage of test kits for Covid-19, there is no way



Protest outside ICE detention center in Miramar, Fla., on March 13.

of knowing if this number is accurate.

There is no plan for the health and welfare of those detained now, let alone the current influx of prisoners. The people that ICE detains are not being checked for symptoms of Covid-19. Their temperatures are taken, and then they are released into the general prison population.

Prisoners are reporting holding rooms with up to 100 detainees being forced to share four bathrooms.

In protest of these inhumane conditions, prisoner cafeteria and janitorial staff in a South Texas processing center have gone on strike. The prisoners are demanding release over the unsanitary conditions.

Detention officers responded by using pepper spray to disperse the 60-person demonstration, and they isolated the nine leaders of the protest, with extra disciplinary charges pending.

Over 3,000 medical professionals are also demanding the release of all detainees held in immigration facilities by ICE.

Prisoners cannot do social distancing, and the inadequate, inhumane conditions are leading to mass suffering.

Abolish ICE!

Release all prisoners! ☮

## Social character of China

Continued from page 8

na. But if the imperialists have their way, if they can destroy the socialist foundation and the Communist Party, they will turn China into another India. That is what is at stake in the struggle to stop the counterrevolution in China.

### 'Market socialism' a false and dangerous concept

This analysis should not be understood in any way as support for the doctrine of "market socialism." In our view the anarchy of the capitalist market is antagonistic to the planning of a socialist society and socialist construction. Capitalist private property is antagonistic to socialist property and production for private accumulation is antagonistic to production for social use and human need.

There are historical circumstances of extreme underdevelopment which compel a socialist government to employ both private and state capitalist methods to promote development of the productive forces and the creation of the working class from the rural population.

It is one thing, however, to use these methods as a temporary expedient, to make a retreat from socialism in order to make socialism triumphant in the struggle against capitalist methods. That was Lenin's idea behind the New Economic Policy. It began in 1921 in the USSR, during the direst times after the civil war left the country in ruins and the working class that survived was going back to the country to get food.

But Lenin always regarded this as a retreat and a crucial struggle. The question, as Lenin put it, was "Who will win?"

China long ago developed economically after the capitalist reforms instituted by Deng Xiaoping. But what should have been a tem-

porary retreat has become an enshrined policy of treating capitalism as a partner with socialism. Private capital grows automatically and with it the economic strength and political influence of the capitalist class, its petty bourgeois hangers-on, as well as the petty bourgeois intelligentsia. This carries great long-term dangers for China.

The socialist component of the economic foundation is dominant at the present. But capitalism is continuing to erode that foundation and do damage to the workers. Furthermore, the new leadership of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang have sent signals that they want to move to the right in the economy. Expanding the opportunities for imperialist investment and moving more and more in the direction of bourgeois economic reforms is playing with fire.

### Revive spirit of Mao, workers' power

Bo Xilai, the former head of the party for Chongqing Province, is now languishing in detention. He has been held for over a year because he sought to revive the cultural and egalitarian spirit of Mao Zedong and because he had a program to retard the march down the capitalist road.

Bo represented a left resistance to the current policies at the level of top leadership. His defeat has paved the way for a further turn to the right.

What is really needed is a sharp turn to the left. The workers must reclaim the socialist rights first established by the Chinese revolution and deepened during the period of Mao. This is the only thing that can revive and secure Chinese socialism in the long run.

But in the meantime, there must be a firm defense of China against every scheme by imperialism and by the domestic capitalist class in China to undermine the socialist foundation that still exists there. ☮

Continued from page 5

who, no matter how bad the situation becomes in those countries, will not turn their backs. For them, no matter the battle field — military, medical or humanitarian — neither retreat nor surrender is an option.

Watching a video of the Cubans' arrival to the applause of grateful Italians, was quite emotive for me. It was a definitive statement that all human beings are one, irrespective of ideology and colour, and even level of development. The acts of the Cubans in rescuing the passengers of the British ship MS Braemar and sending doctors to Italy, is also a lesson that a financially poor, underdeveloped country can come to the rescue of rich and developed countries.

It is instructive that Cuba, an island that is just 110,860 square kilometres with a population of 11.3 million, relying over the decades on raw sugar and tobacco export, has been under U.S. economic, commercial and financial embargo since Oct. 19, 1960. Yet, it has almost 100 percent literacy and one of the most developed health systems in the world. In fact, one of the main medicines China used successfully to treat Covid-19 patients is Interferon Alpha 2b, a drug Cuba produced in 1981 to fight the dengue virus.

For many years, Cuba stood alone and isolated in the Organisation of American States. But through commitment, willpower, consistency and development paradigm, it won over most of the states to its side.

Cuba teaches us in Africa, particularly Nigeria, that there is no alternative to being self-reliant; to building basic institutions and investing in the people. It teaches the Nigerian elites who appropriate the country's resources to themselves and their Western masters that there is no alternative to building local capacity. That if they had built the health system rather than think they can always go abroad for medical treatment, they would not be patients in the dilapidated hospitals, now that the coronavirus has shut out the outside world to all Nigerians irrespective of status.

The Cuban example is no fluke. It is built on the foundations of its founding fathers, like the poet José Martí, 1853-1895; Gen. Antonio Maceo 'The Bronze Titan' 1845-1896; and the later generations like Fidel and Raul Castro, Camilio Cienfuegos, Haydee María and Celia Sánchez, who taught that humanity is one and that its resources must be deployed for common good, particularly in favour of the poor, the weak and marginalized.

The Cuban philosophy is embedded in the thoughts of a man like Ernesto Che Guevara, who taught that: "The life of a single human being is worth a million times more than all the properties of the richest man on earth." The Cubans are living Che's advice that: "We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity is transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force." ☮

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# Carta del presidente Nicolás Maduro al pueblo estadounidense



Caracas, 3 de abril de 2020

## Al Pueblo de los Estados Unidos de América:

Desde hace semanas, el mundo está paralizado, intentando controlar una pandemia que sin duda es el desafío más grande que hemos enfrentado juntos como sociedad y comunidad internacional. Al igual que para el pueblo de Estados Unidos, confrontarla es nuestra prioridad.

Afortunadamente, en Venezuela hemos contado con algunas ventajas. Tomamos medidas muy tempranas de aislamiento y el despistaje ampliado, apoyándonos en nuestro sistema público y gratuito de salud, que cuenta con médicos de familia alrededor de todo el país. Contamos también con la invaluable organización comunitaria para ayudar a elevar la conciencia social y brindar apoyo a los más vulnerables. Igualmente, la solidaridad de Cuba, China, Rusia y el apoyo de la Organización Mundial de la Salud, nos ha permitido obtener insumos médicos necesarios, a pesar de las sanciones ilegales de Donald Trump.

Al expresarles mi solidaridad ante este importante desafío histórico y nuestra consternación y dolor por las consecuencias de la pandemia en EEUU, me veo obligado a también alertarles que, mientras el mundo se enfoca en atender la emergencia del COVID-19, el gobierno de Trump, instrumentalizando una vez más las instituciones para alcanzar sus objetivos electorales y basándose en infamias bajo pretexto de la lucha contra las drogas, ha ordenado el despliegue militar más grande de Estados

Unidos hacia nuestra región en 30 años, con el fin de amenazar a Venezuela y de llevar a nuestra región a un conflicto bélico costoso, sangriento y de duración indefinida.

Como antecedente a esta maniobra falaz, el pasado 26 de marzo, William Barr, un Fiscal General de cuestionable independencia (quién recomendó la invasión de 1989 a Panamá contra Noriega y ayudó a encubrir las irregularidades del escándalo Irán-Contra), presentó, sin mostrar prueba alguna, acusaciones de narcotráfico hacia los Estados Unidos contra mí y contra altos funcionarios del Estado venezolano, a pesar de que la información del propio Departamento de Defensa demuestra que Venezuela no es un país de tránsito primario de drogas hacia los Estados Unidos, como sí lo son países aliados de Washington como Colombia u Honduras.

Es claro, que la administración Trump construye una cortina de humo para ocultar el improvisado y errático manejo de la pandemia en Estados Unidos. Desde un principio Donald Trump le restó importancia y la negó, tal como ha hecho con el cambio climático. Hoy la crisis se agrava simplemente porque, pese a contar con recursos, no está dispuesto a transformar el sistema de salud en uno que priorice el cuidado pleno de la población y no el lucro de ganancias de la medicina privada, las compañías de seguros y las farmacéuticas.

Nosotros en Venezuela no queremos un conflicto armado en nuestra región. Queremos relaciones fraternales, de cooperación, de intercambio y de respeto.

No podemos aceptar amenazas bélicas, ni bloqueos, ni tampoco la intención de instalar

un tutelaje internacional que viola nuestra soberanía y desconoce los avances del último año en el diálogo político sincero entre el gobierno y gran parte de la oposición venezolana, que desea soluciones políticas, y no guerras por petróleo.

Por todo lo anterior, hago un llamado al pueblo de los Estados Unidos para que ponga freno a esta locura, para que responsabilice a sus gobernantes y los obligue a enfocar su atención y sus recursos en la atención urgente de la pandemia. Pido, junto al cese de las amenazas militares, el fin de las sanciones ilegales y el bloqueo que restringe el acceso a insumos humanitarios, tan necesarios hoy en el país. Les pido, con el corazón en la mano, que no permitan que su país se vea arrastrado, una vez más, a otro conflicto interminable, otro Vietnam u otro Irak, pero esta vez más cerca de casa.

No somos tan diferentes, como nos quieren hacer creer con infamias. Somos pueblos buscando una sociedad más justa, libre y compasiva. No dejemos que los intereses particulares de minorías cegadas por ambición nos separen. Nosotros, como dijo una vez nuestro líder Hugo Chávez, compartimos el mismo sueño. El sueño de Martin Luther King es también el sueño de Venezuela y de su gobierno revolucionario. Los invito a luchar juntos por hacer realidad ese sueño.

**No a la guerra de Estados Unidos contra Venezuela**

**No más sanciones criminales  
Queremos Paz**

**Nicolás Maduro Moros**

**Letter from**

## Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to the people of the U.S.

Caracas, April 3, 2020

### To the People of the United States of America:

For weeks now, the world stands still, trying to control a pandemic that, without any doubt, is the greatest challenge we have faced together as a society and as an international community. Our priority is confronting it, as is the priority of the people of the United States.

Fortunately, in Venezuela, we have been able to count on some advantages. We took very early measures of social distancing and amplified testing, relying on our free and public healthcare system that counts doctors throughout the country with what we call family. We also rely on the invaluable community-based organizations to help raise social awareness and support the most vulnerable sectors. The solidarity of Cuba, China, and Russia, and the support of the World Health Organization has likewise allowed us to obtain necessary medical supplies despite Donald Trump's illegal sanctions.

In expressing my solidarity to you in this important historic challenge, as well as our consternation and grief for the consequences of the pandemic in the U.S., I also have the obligation to make you aware that as the world focuses on dealing with the COVID-19 emergency, the Trump Administration, once again is instrumentalizing institutions in order to fulfill electoral objectives, and based on infamies under the pretext of the War on Drugs, has ordered the largest U.S. military deployment in our region in the last 30 years, with the purpose of threatening Venezuela and bringing to our region a costly, bloody, military conflict of indefinite duration.

In the run-up to this fallacious maneuver, on March 26, William Barr, an Attorney General of

questionable independence (who recommended the 1989 invasion of Panama against Noriega and helped cover up the irregularities of the Iran-Contra scandal) filed, without showing any evidence whatsoever, accusations of drug trafficking towards the United States against myself and against senior Venezuelan State officials, even though data from the Department of Defense itself show that, unlike Colombia and Honduras, two of Washington's allied countries, Venezuela is not a primary transit country towards the United States.

It is clear that the Trump Administration is creating a smokescreen to cloud the improvised and erratic handling of the pandemic in the United States. The most optimistic forecast shows that close to 240,000 souls will be lost in the United States. From the beginning, Donald Trump downplayed and even denied it, the same way he has done with climate change. Today, the crisis in the United States aggravates simply because, despite having the resources, he is not willing to transform the healthcare system to prioritize full care for the population instead of profit-based private medicine, insurance companies and pharmaceutical industry.

We in Venezuela do not want an armed conflict in our region. We want brotherly relations of cooperation, exchange and respect.

We cannot accept war threats, nor blockades, nor can we accept the intention of installing an international tutelage that violates our sovereignty and disavows the progress made in the last year in the sincere political dialogue between the government and a large part of the Venezuelan opposition

that wants political solutions and not oil wars.

Based on the foregoing, I call upon the people of the United States to put a stop to this madness, to hold your officials accountable and to force them to focus their attention and their resources on urgently addressing the pandemic. I also ask, together with the end to military threats, the end to the illegal sanctions and blockade that restrict the access of humanitarian goods that are so necessary for the country today. I wholeheartedly ask you not to allow your country to be dragged once again into another unending conflict, another Vietnam, another Iraq, but this time, closer to home.

The peoples of the United States and Venezuela are not as different as their lies intend us to believe. We are peoples seeking a more just, free, and compassionate society. Let us not let the particular interests of minorities blinded by ambition to set us apart. We, as our leader Hugo Chavez once said, share the same dream. The dream of Martin Luther King is also the dream of Venezuela and its revolutionary government. I invite you to struggle together in order to make that dream come true.

**No to a United States war against Venezuela.**

**No more criminal sanctions.**

**We want Peace.**

**Nicolas Maduro Moros**

President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

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